



# Recommendations for REPORTING on OVERDOSE

**A drug overdose** is a medical emergency that occurs when a substance is used in sufficient quantity to cause adverse reactions, up to and sometimes including death. Most overdoses are accidental—an unintentional consequence of an active addiction to a dangerous drug.

**Responsible media coverage can increase understanding of substance use disorders, and reduce misperceptions about people who suffer from them.**

A drug overdose provides an opportunity to educate the community about drug trends (demographics, incidence and prevalence), as well as treatment options and actions needed to prevent future tragedies.

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER PREFERRED LANGUAGE	
AVOID	PREFERRED
abuse	use, misuse
abuser, user, addict, alcoholic	person with a substance use disorder, person misusing substances
bender, off the wagon	relapse, use
clean, sober	in recovery
rehab	treatment

Try to use "people first" language – naming the person first and the condition second.

## SUGGESTIONS

- ▶ In photos and videos:
  - Avoid substance use triggering imagery (e.g., cooking drugs in a spoon, needles)
  - Avoid B-roll of a stereotypical scene (e.g., impoverished neighborhood)
  - **Do not use photos/videos of the overdose**
- ▶ Speak with a public health professional or an expert on substance use, rather than a first responder or law enforcement officer
- ▶ Report on overdoses and substance use disorder as a public health issue
- ▶ Remind your audience to call 911 immediately if they suspect someone is experiencing an overdose
- ▶ Offer hope – emphasize that:
  - Treatment works
  - Recovery is possible
  - Overdoses don't have to be fatal



314-962-3456 [ncada-stl.org](http://ncada-stl.org)

NCADA works to reduce or prevent the harms of alcohol and other drug use through education, intervention and advocacy.

## HELPFUL SIDEBAR STORIES

### RISK FACTORS FOR AN OPIOID OVERDOSE

- ▶ Recreational use of opioids
- ▶ Mixing opioids with other prescriptions, alcohol, or other illegal substances
- ▶ Using opioids from a new source or in a new location (change in amount or purity)
- ▶ Using opioids after a period of abstinence
- ▶ Recent overdose

### SIGNS OF AN OPIOID OVERDOSE

- ▶ Shallow or no breathing
- ▶ Pinpoint pupils
- ▶ Blue/Gray lips or fingernails
- ▶ Cold and clammy skin
- ▶ Unresponsive

### STEPS TO PREVENT AN OPIOID OVERDOSE

- ▶ Talk to an NCADA counselor about referral to treatment, or to get free Narcan
- ▶ Never use when alone
- ▶ Be extra careful after a period of abstinence
- ▶ Never mix opioids with alcohol or other substances
- ▶ Have Narcan available
- ▶ Make sure others know how to administer Narcan

### NATIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ [drugabuse.gov](http://drugabuse.gov)
- ▶ [samhsa.gov](http://samhsa.gov)
- ▶ [dea.gov](http://dea.gov)
- ▶ [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)